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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how one West Virginia school district solved its principal shortage dilemma by creating a leadership academy in partnership with the nearby Marshall University Graduate College. This academy was designed to encourage potential educational leaders from within the district and to provide a variety of experiences which would assist these individuals in developing and enhancing their leadership abilities. The primary organizational support came from the local school district and Marshall University Graduate College. The university provided personnel for planning and implementing the program, and the district provided funding and personnel. The first class of participants began in 1995. A group of 70 current and prospective administrators (teachers and school district personnel) began with a 1-week summer workshop that introduced the mission. In subsequent years, participants were offered multiple tracks of experiences during the summer workshop. Small groups established during the summer continued to meet during the school year, completing varied activities (e.g., projects and action research). Four activities were scheduled during the school year. Academy activities centered around specific leadership topics. After 2 years in the academy, potential leaders could participate in apprenticeship experiences. Since the academy's inception, 34 of 36 new administrators placed in the district have been academy participants. The school district has benefitted by having a cadre of strong potential leaders. (SM)

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The Principal Shortage: A University - School District Solution

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The Principal Shortage: A University - School District Solution

As early as 1983 John Goodlad, in his book *A Place Called School*, had identified the need for a formal program for developing school leaders with his statement "It simply is not established procedure in the educational system to identify and groom cadres of the most promising prospects for top positions" (p. 306). Goodlad also noted in the same work that ". . . there should be a continuous district wide effort to identify employees with leadership potential" (p.306). In 1998 the National Associations of Elementary School Principals and Secondary School Principals conducted a joint exploratory study of the applicant pool for school leaders and found that approximate one-half of school districts surveyed reported a shortage of qualified candidates for principal positions. An earlier study by the National Center for Education Statistics, (1993) indicated that 54% of the principals surveyed nationally were over age 50 and 37% were between 40 and 49 years of age.

The Dilemma: Facing A Potential Leadership Dearth

The Kanawha County (WV) School system consists of 31,000 students and 87 schools. In terms of student population it is the largest district in the state. The county is diverse in nature, including the relatively urban area of the state's capital city, surrounding suburbs, and an extensive rural area. Stirred by what they were reading in the literature, school system leaders examined the demographics of the the administrative personnel within their district, both at the school and central office levels. The shocking results of their inquiry indicated that the potential loss of current administrators due to retirements was significant. When this number of potential retirees was considered along with the numbers of administrators typically lost through normal attrition, it was clear that the potential for the system to be impeded by a lack of leadership in the relatively near future was a serious threat.

The Response: Leaders Looking for Answers

In response to these findings pointing to a possible disaster, a committee was formed to suggest solutions for this potential leadership dearth. This committee consisted of representative leaders from various school system groups along with faculty members from the Leadership Studies program at the

nearby Marshall University Graduate College. The result of this committee's efforts was the development of an academy for potential leaders from within the district. The mission of this academy would be to identify and encourage potential educational leaders, and to provide a variety of experiences which would assist these individuals in developing and enhancing their leadership abilities. The original development committee would serve both as a steering committee and as the beginning staff for the academy.

Support: Leading the Leadership Academy

The primary organizational support for the Leadership Academy came from two organizations, the local school district and Marshall University Graduate College. The support provided by the school district took the form specifically of funding and personnel, but also of general support of the concept and extension of the Academy. Released time for participants, encouragement for potential participants, and a general acknowledgment of the value of the academy proved to be important contributions from the district level. The collaborative nature of the support provided by these two institutions created a unique atmosphere for professional development. Support from Marshall University has taken on the form of personnel for planning and implementing the program. While the specific professors working on the academy staff varied from year to year, the staff always included at least two members of the Leadership Studies faculty. Additionally, other professors offered professional services as requested by the staff. The university also provided graduate credit for the academy participants.

Financial support for the project took a variety of forms. The district was already involved in the first year of a three-year Title VI grant for Innovative Educational Programs. Because this grant requires an annual revision, the Leadership Academy could be included in the second year's plan. These monies sustained the project for two years, the final two years of the Title VI grant. Additional smaller grants were sought and obtained to continue the project after the second year. As the project was implemented and success was demonstrated, funds from the district's budget allocation for staff development were made available to continue and expand the program.

The Format: Selecting Potential Leaders

Initial plans for the academy, based on the original available funding, included involvement for two years. As the project grew and demonstrated success, however, the staff continued to meet and evaluate the needs of the participants. Consequently, activities were planned and implemented to allow each "class"of participants to continue to expand their knowledge and understanding of leadership issues, experiencing new and varied activities as they continued to participate. The format of the academy was designed with increasing complexity to provide basic experiences for new participants and more advanced activities for "experienced" academy members.

The first class of academy participants was chosen in the spring of 1995. The class consisted of 70 individuals, representing both current administrators and prospective administrators, and including participants from elementary, middle and secondary schools as well as district levels. Subsequent classes of approximately 25 each joined the academy each year for the next three years. The original plans for the academy included criteria for participant selection, including the possession of a valid administrative certificate. As additional applicants who had not completed the requirements for certification expressed a desire to participate and as funding continued to be available, selection criteria were relaxed to include individuals who were in the process of seeking certification. It became possible for all individuals interested in participating and willing to make a commitment to continued participation to join the academy.

New members of the academy began their experience with a week long summer workshop. This workshop provided an extensive introduction to the basic mission of the academy, allowing members to interact individually and in small groups, as they explored leadership concepts. In subsequent years, multiple tracks of experiences were planned to allow returning participants to continue to participate without repeating earlier experiences. The summer workshops continued to provide opportunities for all participants to be involved both in common activities for the entire group and graduated activities which separated new participants from the group, allowing them to be involved in activities experienced by earlier participants during their first year.

To continue and to reinforce the experiences from the summer workshop, four activities were scheduled during each school year. To accommodate the needs of members and to alleviate the effect of these activities on the school system, two of these activities were scheduled during the evening. The other two activities were scheduled during the school day, requiring released time or substitute coverage for participants.

The small groups established during the summer workshops also continued to meet and interact during the school year. These small groups functioned independently, scheduling meetings as needed and as was convenient for the members of the group. Their activities varied from year to year, including studying selected topics, planning projects to present to the district, and learning and implementing action research.

The Activities: Developing Potential Leaders

Because the original intent of the academy included the expansion of concepts covered in the approved certification program, the academy activities were centered around specific leadership topics. Some of the topics covered included the Increasing Human Effectiveness program, visioning, personality types of leaders, personal management techniques, time management, stress management, team building, and human relations skills. Many of these topics were presented by members of the academy staff or other knowledgeable district employees, but an effort was also made to expose members to nationally known speakers. Over the course of the first three years, the financial strength of the academy made possible presentations by a number of well known educators, including Marty Krovetz, William Purkey, Judy Olson-Ness, Gene Wilhoit, Jim Heyman, Philip Vincent, Carol Scearce, Anthony Gregoric, Jerry King, and Julia Tomlinson. While these activities provided a wealth of information for academy participants, the academy staff also included a variety of activities intended to provide opportunities for participants to exhibit and expand their leadership potential. The small "study groups" also served as action research groups, identifying system-wide problems, studying these issues and proposing research–based solutions.

After participating in the academy for two years, in response to needs as perceived by the planning staff, participants were offered an opportunity to participate in apprenticeship experiences. To provide these apprenticeships, practicing administrators were surveyed to determine their interest in servings as mentors. Interested administrators were then paired with academy participants, providing the academy participants with two separate, week long experiences with selected administrators. The district again demonstrated its support for the academy by allowing participants released time to take advantage of these experiences. Funding from academy sources supported the hiring of substitute teachers where necessary.

The Success: A Growing Field of Leaders

The successes of the Leadership Academy have been impressive. Since the inception of the academy, 34 of 36 new administrators placed in the district have been academy participants. Two of these 34 placements have been the current superintendent and an assistant superintendent. Additional grants monies to continue the academy as well as continued support from the district office and the elected board of education have been received based on its initial success. For participants, the Leadership Academy provides training to increase and enhance their leadership skills, time and encouragement to reflect on their personal philosophy and values, the opportunity to form networks which will serve as their support if they become administrators, a global view of the district, and an opportunity to become known in a large system. For the school district, the Leadership Academy has developed a cadre of strong potential leaders, provided current district leaders with opportunities to get better acquainted with prospective administrators, and an opportunity for current administrators to sharpen their skills.

The Leadership Academy has not functioned, however, without its share of difficulties. One of the most pervasive of these difficulties has been maintaining a clarity of purpose and focus, particularly as this relates to leadership versus management issues. This struggle to maintain a leadership focus is largely fueled by the academy's participant's desire for concrete activities. Other struggles faced by the

academy have been the selection of participants for a limited availability of apprenticeships, the participant's expectation of job placement and attrition of persons once admitted to the academy.

The Future: Maintaining the Leadership Potential

The success of the program is a clear validation of the claims of Goodlad. Not only did the existing leadership recognize the need for action to address a serious systemic problem, but the actions of these leaders modeled the best of all possible approaches to the issues. Their use of proactive problem solving, creation and communication of a shared vision, empowerment of staff and participants, strategic planning, and reflective and reactive practice to create continuous improvement has allowed the academy not only continue to exist, but to thrive as an example of university and school district collaboration. Continuing the process of constant re-evaluation, collaboration and cooperation, the established process of the academy and its members will allow them to face the problems of the future positively, professionally and confidently.

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